

Environmental News

EPA

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EPA approves changes to Arizona's cleaner burning gasoline program

SAN FRANCISCO -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today approved Arizona's revised air quality plan that makes changes to its Cleaner Burning Gasoline program.

The revision affects fuel requirements for gasoline distributed in the Phoenix area and small portions of Pinal and Yavapai counties. Cars, trucks and buses cause about 50 percent of the Valley's smog.

Arizona's Cleaner Burning Gasoline program, which was chosen by the state, has improved air quality. The use of cleaner burning gasoline has been responsible for dramatic improvements in the Valley's air quality since 1997. Its use in the metropolitan Phoenix non-attainment area reduces hydrocarbon emissions by 29 tons per day, nitrogen oxides by 7 tons per day and carbon monoxide (during winter months) by 43 tons per day.

"Today's action paves the way for redesignation of the Phoenix metropolitan area for both carbon monoxide and 1-hour ozone," said Wayne Nastri, the EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest region. "We've worked very closely with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Arizona Department of Weights & Measures to finalize this rule in time for the transition to the 2004 summer fuel season."

The Phoenix area has been reporting clean data for the pollutants for more than six years and can be redesignated to attainment after the EPA receives and approves maintenance plans that the state must submit for each pollutant.

"This approval is good news for Valley residents because it will go a long way toward eliminating the health and environmental risks associated with MTBE while giving gasoline producers the flexibility they need to provide economical gasoline that meets our clean air standards," said Steve Owens, director of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

Methyl tertiary-butyl ether, or MTBE, is a potential human carcinogen that has been detected nationwide in groundwater and has in some cases contaminated drinking water sources. The elimination of the oxygen content requirement will expand the range of options for refiners to make cleaner burning gasoline that meets Arizona's performance standards for air quality.

Under the revised plan, the wintertime oxygenated fuels program will change so that only fuel

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similar to California's fuel -- a cleaner type of gasoline -- is sold during the winter months. Ethanol will also be required in all wintertime fuel, but the minimum oxygen content will no longer be required in summertime fuel, which facilitates the phase out of MTBE.

This action ratifies the wintertime oxygenated fuels program that has been in place since 2000, which changed the fuel standards to a cleaner type of gasoline during the winter months. Ethanol will also be required in all wintertime fuel, but the minimum oxygen content will no longer be required in summertime fuel, which facilitates the phase out of MTBE.

Medical studies have shown that a combination of these types of pollutants can cause the following:

- Ground-level ozone, or smog, irritates nose, throat and lungs and can also damage lung tissue making it harder to breathe. Additionally, it may cause coughing, headaches, nausea, as well as, premature aging of lung tissue.
- Carbon monoxide, an odorless but highly toxic gas emitted in motor vehicle exhaust, reduces the ability of blood to carry oxygen. It harms the nervous system and is particularly hazardous to people with heart, circulatory, lung, or breathing problems. Some people are particularly affected, including children who are active outdoors, outdoor workers, the elderly and those with respiratory diseases such as asthma.

Gasoline standards are regulated by the EPA, ADEQ and the Arizona Department of Weights and Measures, which is charged with ensuring gasoline sold in Arizona meets the state's performance standards.

“Last year, Weights and Measures conducted more than 1,400 fuel quality inspections throughout the state and found that 99 percent met state requirements. We are proud to be able to assist in the effort to raise Arizonans’ standard of living by maintaining an active presence in the marketplace and aggressive enforcement of fuel standards,” said Art Macias, director of the Arizona Department of Weights & Measures.

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